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# MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE BULLETIN

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Vol. XV

SEPTEMBER, 1920

No. 1

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## Vermont As An Educational Environment

An Address at the Opening of the 121st Year of  
Middlebury College, September 23, 1920



BY PRESIDENT JOHN M. THOMAS

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Published by the College, September, October, November, December, January, February, April, and July, and entered as second class matter at the postoffice Middlebury, Vt., under act of Congress, July 16, 1894.



# VERMONT AS AN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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## OPENING ADDRESS

SEPTEMBER 23, 1920

At the fiftieth anniversary of Middlebury College, August 22, 1850, Daniel P. Thompson of the Class of 1820, author of "The Green Mountain Boys", the book that gave Vermont its fame, spoke as follows:

"About thirty years ago, a poor, untutored, unfriended boy, who had never seen books but in visions, whose almost every merit, indeed, consisted in

'The dream, the thirst, the wild desire,  
Delirious, yet divine—to know'—

found his way out of the woods to Middlebury College. And during his residence here, having been inured to the active habits which a boyhood life on a farm in a new part of the country naturally engenders, and which cannot at once be thrown off; and being withal an enthusiastic admirer of nature in her more undisturbed retreats, he wandered, in his vacations and leisure days, over nearly every square mile of the surrounding region from the third Falls of the Otter upwards, to its mouth downwards,—from the margin of the beautiful Champlain, westward, to the summits of the towering Green Mountains, eastward, pausing in his solitary rapture, over its picturesque scenes of hill and dale, lake and river, and taking mental daguerreotypes of them all.

"These, in after days, gradually grouped themselves around the seat of the Alma Mater which had made him intellectually what he was,—which had drawn to itself his fond and clustering associations and which, therefore, became the bright centre-piece of a thus curiously composed ideal picture.

"The impresses of such scenes,—drawn by the glowing pencil of youthful fancy upon the fresh, unvexed ground-work of youthful feeling, and kept bright by such associations,—are prone to occupy a prominent place in the mind of the maturer man, to be constantly struggling up to the light, and forcing themselves upon the view of others. They did so, at least, in his case; and in subsequently devoting his leisure to the composition of a literary work, illustrative of the Revolutionary action and early settlement of his own loved Vermont, he laid the scene in this section of the country; because, while his general purposes would be equally well thus subserved, it would afford him, besides the advantages of eye-drawn description, an opportunity—a gratifying opportunity, to bring out many of his long cherished pictures. And in following the chain of his partially assumed events from place to place in the rounds of his former rambles, he came at length to the site of the future Middlebury; when pausing, in fancy, on yon commanding swell destined to be crowned by the proud and enduring marble pile emblematic of the honor and permanency of the institution nestling within its walls,—when pausing thus, and pondering on what that spot was,—on what it has since become,—what it had been to him, and what great and benign influences it had scattered abroad through and upon thousands of others in the land, he, in the fullness of feeling, exclaimed:

'O, if there be a town in Vermont, whose first set of inhabitants deserved the appellation of high-minded and worthy, it was the early settlers of Middlebury. Distinguished from their first pitch on the fertile banks of the

Otter, for enterprise, firmness and intelligence, they were among the foremost to resist the aggressions of a government which, unwittingly perhaps, had lent itself to aid the unprincipled scheme of a few rapacious land speculators; while the opening scenes of the Revolution found them ready to engage, with the same alacrity, and with the best of their means, in the greater work of achieving the independence of their whole country. And scarcely had the storm of war passed over, and the sun-light of peace begun to break in on their infant settlement, before they united, with a zeal as extraordinary, considering their means and circumstances, as it was commendable, in rearing, by private munificence alone, a collegiate institution which, for many succeeding years, did more towards elevating the moral and literary character of Vermont than any one cause operating within her borders. And her Alumni, now many of them in eminence at the bar, and in the pulpit, from the humble school room to the Senate chamber of the nation, but nobly dispensing her light among the people of every clime upon the face of the broad earth, whither, in the fearless and enterprising spirit of their fathers they have scattered themselves,—now to teach the arts to the boorish Russ or besotted Turk,—now to assist the enslaved Greek, or South American, in his struggles for freedom, and now to rear the standard of the Cross among the degraded Pagans of the East,—her grateful Alumni, often, turn back, in fancy, to their beloved Alma Mater,

“To linger delighted o'er scenes recall'd there,”

and admire, and bless the noble and self-sacrificing spirit of Painter, Chipman, Miller, Storrs, Matthews and others of her munificent founders, who made themselves poor in pecuniary estate, that they might make the children of their country rich in knowledge'.”

What interests me particularly in this noble tribute is

Thompson's testimony to the influence of his Vermont environment in his education. His wanderings in fields and woods up and down this valley, his excursions in the mountains, to Lake Champlain and Lake Dunmore, wrought mightily upon his mind and spirit. The hills and the forests were important elements in his education. He studied deeply and intimately also in the early records of this region, so that in scaling mountains and threading forests he did not merely look upon beautiful scenery, but he made real to his mind the character and spirit of the men who settled these valleys and won and saved the freedom of the early Vermont commonwealth.

We look out to-day upon the same majestic mountains as greeted the eye of the author of the story which gave the world its fixed impression of the character of Ethan Allen and the early Vermonters. The same documents and sources are open to us as those which so stirred his imagination, and every year is bringing new ones to light. We ought to make more of our Vermont environment. I trust we may soon find larger use in an educational way of the magnificent Green Mountain Estate which is the unique possession of this college. Many of you are Vermonters by birth and residence; others have chosen Vermont as the place of your college education. To all of you Vermont has much to give, through its rugged climate, its beauty of valley and mountain, and particularly through its marvellously interesting and instructive history, especially the story of its founders, the men who made Vermont.

In an old hair-cloth, brass-studded trunk, a faithful repository for many years of some of our college archives, there is an age-yellowed bit of paper, entitled, "Schedule of Articles to Beneficiaries of the Northwestern Branch of the American Education Society, from the Depository in Middlebury, 1821." It records that W. P. Hooker, "Receiver" of

the Society—the term evidently has another connotation than financial embarrassment—had delivered in behalf of the Northwestern Education Society,—

"To	Henry Boynton	
	1 vest, valued at	\$ 2 50
	1 pr. socks	50
	1 hat (I suppose)	3 50
	2 shirts and 1 shirtee	4 50
	2 handkerchiefs	1 00
	1 silver watch	9 00
To	Solomon Hardy	
	1 pr. thick pantaloons	4 50
	1 thin vest	2 00
To	Frye Bailey Reed	
	2 pr. socks	1 00
	2½ yds. cloth	3 34
	1 double cravat	67
	7 yds. cotton cloth	1 75
	2½ yds. blue gulled cloth	4 50
To	Luther Shaw	
	2¾ yds. cloth	2 67
	vest pattern	75
To	Merrit Harmon	
	8½ yds. great coat cloth	11 00
	4¼ yds. coat cloth	6 50
	7 yds. cotton for shirts	1 75
To	William P. Atwater	
	1 surtout	10 00
	2¾ yds. cloth for pantaloons	3 25
To	Lyman Gilbert	
	1 pr. mittens	50
		<hr/>
		\$76 68

The above prices are nominal—some high, others low,—as they were valued by the travelling agent and those who made the donations. Some other articles may have been delivered in my absence.

W. P. Hooker, Receiver."

*Henry Boynton* was a student in Middlebury College in the Class of 1826 and was born in Cornwall, Vermont. *Solomon Hardy* hailed from Hollis, N. H., and was graduated in 1824. He became a Home Missionary in the West, and was the father of seven sons. *Frye Bailey Reed* of the

Class of 1824 entered college from Brookfield, Vt., and was a missionary in western New York and in Wisconsin for fifty years. *Luther Shaw*, 2nd, came from Rutland, graduated in 1826, served missionary churches in Michigan for thirty years, and sought recreation in his old age as traveling agent for the American Bible Society. *Merrit Harmon* of Rupert graduated in 1825 and took his "great coat" on missionary service to Michigan, whence he later pushed west to Iowa. *William P. Atwater*, of Castleton, was a member of the Class of 1824, but the \$10 surtout must have spoiled him, since he did not graduate. The fifty-cent mittens of *Lyman Gilbert*, of Brandon and the Class of 1824, failed to win him to missionary service, for he spent his life in the luxuries of a Congregational pastorate in Newton, Mass.

My interest in this old schedule is in the location of the towns from which these young men came, and the geographical portion of the name of the society of which they were beneficiaries: Hollis, N. H., and the Vermont towns of Cornwall, Brookfield, Rutland, Rupert, Castleton, and Brandon. And the organization was the "Northwestern Education Society", organized and promoted to assist young men of the Northwest to an education. Other documents in the old trunk prove conclusively that the object of this society—the pioneer of American Education Societies—was not to send men to the Northwest, but to help Northwestern young men. Vermont was then—or at the time when the Society took its name—the Northwest. There was a time when Vermont was the western frontier. All through the years of its foundation and settlement it was regarded as the far, forbidding West. Fifty years after the beginning of rapid growth of the State, the designation Northwest was not incongruous in the name of one of its benevolent agencies.

The feel of the West—consciousness of possession of immense spaces, of marvelous fertility, of unexampled economic opportunity—came over the early settlers of Vermont.

Writing in 1794, Dr. Samuel Williams said,—“This is the youngest of the States, an inland country, and now rapidly changing from a *vast tract of uncultivated wilderness*, to numerous and extensive settlements. In this stage of society, industry and economy seem to produce the greatest effects, in the shortest periods of time.” (History of Vermont, 1794, p. viii) The impression of tremendous size and of a wonderful new wealth of nature is thus recorded by Dr. Williams in another passage:—“Uncultivated by the hand of man, it (Vermont) presents to our view a vast tract of woods, abounding with trees, plants, and flowers, almost infinite in number, and of the most various species and kinds.” (ibid. p. 66) Again he says:—“The land included within these limits is of a very fertile nature, fitted for all the purposes and productions of agriculture. The soil is deep, and of a dark colour; rich, moist, warm, and loamy. It bears corn and other kinds of grain, in large quantities, as soon as it is cleared of the wood, without any ploughing or preparation; and after the first crops, naturally turns to rich pasture or mowing.” The familiar Western ring is heard in Dr. Williams’ comments on “the power with which nature acts in the productions of vegetable life in this part of America,” denoting, he says, “an energy, a power in the vegetable life, which nature has never exceeded in the same climate, in any other part of the globe.” (ibid. p. 80)

Visitors to Palestine, observing the poverty-stricken appearance of the country, have often marvelled at the Biblical descriptions of it, as a land flowing with milk and honey, “a land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig trees and pomegranates; a land of oil olives and honey.” With all allowance for the bleeding taxation of the Turk, it does not seem possible that those stony hillsides could ever have been described as “a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack anything in it.” The explanation is that the visitor approaches Palestine from the well-

tilled fields of Europe and America, while the people who found it a land flowing with milk and honey approached it from the desert. In contrast with the steppes of Moab and the sands of Arabia, the holy land was a paradise of fertility and wealth. To realize the mind of any people as they settle a new country, one must consider its contrast with the region from which they came, not its qualities in relation to territory which has since been opened for settlement.

The men who made Vermont came from Connecticut and western Massachusetts, and largely from the hill towns in those regions. Any one who has travelled in those parts, or who has observed from a car window from Bellows Falls to Boston, with the numberless acres of rocks and scrub oaks, can well understand the impression of boundless fertility, of almost miraculous exuberance of vegetation, which was made upon the early settlers by the rich valleys of Vermont. They felt themselves in God's new country of boundless wealth and promise—the same feeling that has come over the Western pioneer in every stage of his march to the Pacific.

The kinship of Vermont with the ever-receding West is further manifest in the rapid acquirement of substantial means by the men who made the commonwealth. The West has always been a get-rich-quick country, in purpose, ambition, and spirit, if not always, in fact, in individual instances. Such was Vermont in her early days,—an opportunity to improve one's condition, at least to a competence, by leaps and bounds. A year or two ago an exiled Vermonter in the woods of Wisconsin sent me a pamphlet reciting the matrimonial misfortunes of one Elias Hall, who was brought by his father from Cheshire, Conn., to Pittsford, Vt., in 1785, and who removed in 1800 to Middlebury. The title page reads:—

DISCLOSURE OF FACTS  
in consequence  
of a  
*DECREE FOR ALIMONY*  
BY THE  
SUPREME COURT  
Addison County, January Term, 1823,  
against  
ELIAS HALL

---

"The worst of curses yet bestow'd on man,  
"Since first in paradise his woes began,  
'Is to be doom'd to drag the load of life,  
'Forever goaded by a scoulding wife."

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Montpelier, Vt.,

1825.

I will not entertain you by a recital of Elias Hall's struggle for freedom, but I am interested in the incidental references in his narrative of woe to his business adventures and the success which attended them. Hall came to Middlebury in 1800, when the settlement was only about a dozen years old, a young man without a cent. He went to work in a shop and learned the trade of a gunsmith. He says: "After about ten years' industry, and the most rigid economy, I

found, by estimation, that I had acquired from ten to twelve thousand dollars worth of property; consisting of building lots and buildings in Middlebury, wild lands, mills, etc. I had acquired the whole by my own industry and hard earnings, not by speculation." (p. 5) Imagine a young mechanic doing that in Middlebury today, or in any other town in Vermont!

You have to travel to the far West before you find similar rapid increase in estate, or the spirit of ambition and achievement which leads to it. It is a pioneer accomplishment. Elias Hall did it in Vermont, but it was when Vermont was the pioneer West, when every town in the State was filled with young men alert to establish their fortunes, in the real Western spirit.

To the possibilities of rapid economic advance in the early days of Vermont, the historian from whom I have already quoted, Dr. Williams, bears striking testimony. He says: "Amidst the hard living and hard labour that attends the forming a new settlement, the settler has the most flattering prospects and encouragements. One hundred acres of land in a new town does not generally cost him more than he can spare from the wages of one or two years. Besides maintaining himself, the profits of his labour will generally enable a young man, in that period of time, to procure himself such a tract of land. When he comes to apply his labour to his own land, the produce of it becomes extremely profitable. The first crop of wheat will fully pay him for all the expense he has been at, in clearing up, sowing, and fencing his land; and, at the same time, increases the value of the land eight or ten times the original cost. In this way, every day's labour spent in clearing up his land receives high wages in the grain which it procures, and adds at the same time a quantity of improved land to the farm. An acre of land which, in its natural state, cost him perhaps the half of one day's labour, is thus in one year made of that value that it

will afterwards annually produce him from fifteen to twenty-five bushels of wheat, or other kinds of produce of equal value. In this way, the profits attending labour on a new settlement are the greatest that ever can take place in agriculture; the labourer constantly receiving double wages. He receives high wages in the produce of his corn or wheat; and he receives much higher wages, of another kind, in the annual addition of a new tract of cultivated land to his farm. This double kind of wages, nature with great benevolence and design has assigned to the man of industry, when he is first making a settlement in the uncultivated parts of America: and in two or three years he acquires a very comfortable and independent subsistence for a family, derived from no other source but the earth and his own industry."

The same author's description of the activity and enterprise which characterized the Vermont settlers reads like the prospectus of a Western Board of Trade. "A spirit of activity and enterprise is everywhere found in a new State. Depending upon their own industry, and having nothing to expect from speculation and gaming in public funds, or from the errors or vices of government, the views of the people are directed to their own employments and business, as the only probable method of acquiring subsistence and estate. Hence arises a spirit of universal activity and enterprise in business. No other pursuits or prospects are suffered to divert their attention; for there is nothing to be acquired in any other way. Neither begging, or gaming, or trading upon public funds, measures, and management can be profitable employments to the people who live at a distance from wealthy cities and the seat of government. The only profitable business is to pursue their own profession and calling. To this pursuit their views become directed; and here their activity and enterprise become remarkable. No difficulty or hardship seems to discourage them; and the perseverance of a few years generally serves to overcome the obstacles that lay in

their way at first. It is only those who are of this enterprising spirit who venture to try their fortunes in the woods; and in a few years it generally raises them into easy and comfortable circumstances."

It is a temptation to parallel many characterizations and praises of early Vermont with familiar boastings of Western historians and promoters, as each new territory from western New York to the Pacific slope has been hailed as the country of man's perfect dreams. The climate of Vermont is the most healthful and invigorating in the world; the woods and streams produce game and fish in abundance never witnessed elsewhere; the mean period of human life exceeds that of the ancient and populous countries of Europe; the soil exhibits a power of vegetable life never exceeded in any part of the globe; the political institutions guarantee perfect freedom and protect all classes in perfect enjoyment of every right and happiness; the population is made up of the brave and hardy, the sifted and selected of older societies. All this is thoroughly Western and stamps the men who made Vermont with the unmistakable mark of the Western pioneer.

Vermont was the first Northwest in the manner of its settlement and in the character of its population. It was opened for possession just when the American people began their rapid march toward the Pacific. It took nearly 200 years of American settlement to reach and people the valleys of Vermont. Southward the progress had been fully as slow, and the ragged line of settlement hugged close to the summit of the Appalachians. After the Revolution began the great migration, which is the outstanding fact in American history, which peopled the vast convex of the continent from the western slope of the Alleghenies to the foot-hills of the Rockies. From Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay to southern Vermont the advance of settlement was scarcely a mile a year. The settlers were few; Indians held the country and the soil was forbidding. The forests were clogged with vines

and brush, and it took a man a life-time to clear 30 acres. On the prairies a strong plow and four horses changed virgin soil into fertile farm in one season. There the frontiersman's advance was 20 to 30 miles a year. It was this physical fact which enabled the nation to take possession of the vast mid-continent in a fourth the time which had been required for the conquest of the Atlantic slope.

The territory of Vermont is not prairie, but it far surpasses lower New England in agricultural possibilities. In the Connecticut and Champlain countries and the innumerable narrow but fertile river-beds of Vermont, the New Englander first came into contact with rich American soil. He managed to wrest a living from the sand dunes of Massachusetts for the love of God and his dislike of Episcopacy, but he caught the breath of heavy-laden fields, he thrilled with the possibilities of the wealth of a virgin continent, when first the West opened before him.

The men who made Vermont were the advance guard of the American army of conquest of the West. They did not come for religious purposes. They were satisfied with both religious and political conditions in the older communities. But they wanted more land and richer fields. They were not pushed out; they were invited in. It was not undesirable conditions behind them, but attractive opportunities before them, which were the dynamic of the movement. In all the settlements of the maritime Atlantic plain, it was not so much the desirability of the new region which effected the change of home as the dissatisfaction of the immigrants with conditions, sometimes economic, sometimes religious, sometimes political, in the countries of the old world. But the opening of Vermont was the beginning of a new movement with a new motive. The vast continent had begun to beckon. Generations had come at last which could turn their backs definitely and forever on the old world, and who felt their fortunes bound up solely with the new. Then was

begun the real conquest of the continent, and in this conquest the men who made Vermont were in the forefront and opened the highway for the great horde which followed them, the vast army, larger than ever an emperor commanded, of the American Western pioneers.

The settlement of Vermont has its kinship, not with Jamestown and Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay, but with the extension of American territory over the vast interior. The original Vermonter was not the weak successor of John Smith and John Alden, but the precursor of the Western frontiersman. Ethan Allen and Daniel Boone were brothers in spirit, pioneers of a new race, the stalwart men who subdued the continent and wrought for America its home. It is a far cry from the Pilgrim Fathers, with their Cambridge learning, their psalm singing, and their missionaries to the Indians, to the Green Mountain Boys, with their buckskin breeches, their rude, brusque speech, and their beech seal for Tories, but across all the miles of forest and prairie the Green Mountain Boy is own brother to the cow-boy of the plains and the trapper and fur-trader of the Rockies. The older communities of the Atlantic seaboard have contributed much to the life of the nation. They have promoted culture, swayed national policies, developed American industry, and preserved a stable finance. But the national domain, the continent whose broad extent is the foundation of the distinctive American culture, whose wealth has enforced the will of the nation, furnished food for her industry and saved her finance, was won by the pioneer with the squirrel cap. He has had too little honor in American history. His rough speech and forbidding exterior have not especially commended him to those who write books. His vices have been plain enough in all too many instances—coarse language, intemperance in drink, anger that burned fiercely, hatred of an enemy that lasted till death. But his virtues are also discernible—he could fell the largest trees and ford the

wildest rivers, he could shoot straight and wait for his range under fire, and take care of himself alone in the forest in the dead of winter; he was afraid of nothing under God's open sky, and his boy could take up his axe and rifle at an age when European offspring are scarcely out of the cradle. If virtues are qualities which God needs for His work, the qualities of the American pioneer must be judged less harshly than our drawing-room doctrines have been inclined.

The men who made Vermont were pioneers of pioneers—the ambitious, discontented, restless element from a community made up of eager and impetuous spirits. The American wilderness had already begun to do its work with them. Their clan had been trained for 150 years in the conquest of the forest. They knew the manner of the god of the land. They knew its game and how to hunt and fish. There was no need for thousands of them to starve, as at Jamestown, while experiments were being made in trying to grow European crops in the European way. They had learned the new life necessary for the new world and they pressed into its heart with the eagerness of men who were creating a new civilization.

Such men are always democratic and lovers of freedom in the extreme. They had no other idea than that they were complete masters in all affairs in the new lands they had bought and paid for, and which they had won from the wilderness by severest hardship and toil. They carried individual and community liberty to such a length that it impressed conservative and cultured observers from the sea-board region as the veriest anarchy and disorder. When Timothy Dwight, ex-President of Yale College, traveled in northern New England at various times from 1798 to 1810, he noted the radical and unconventional ideas of large portions of the inhabitants and characterized the Vermonters as "Arabian troops", "lovers of disorder". Their tendency to go into politics he especially deprecated. His judgment of

the inhabitants of the new region doubtless represents fairly the opinion of the more cultured communities. I mention it, not because I think his judgment correct, but to illustrate the new force which was coming into American life. He thought the people of Vermont restless, bold, ambitious, cunning, talkative, skilled in land-jobbing. The noise of the men in the taverns talking politics until late at night disturbed his rest, and he lit his candle to record in his note book that "first settlers are usually those who have met with difficulties at home".

This is President Dwight's idea of the men who, as he confesses, had already struggled onward from New England to Louisiana, i. e., the Mississippi valley. It is the conservative Easterner's idea of the Western pioneer, whom we can now more justly estimate from the results of his labor, the winning of the continent for the national home.

Undoubtedly, from his point of view, President Dwight was a fair and impartial observer. But as a seaboard man he could not understand nor portray sympathetically the new style of manhood which the American wilderness was creating, just as later the East could not understand Abraham Lincoln. Nothing shows this more clearly than his characterization of Ethan Allen. Dr. Dwight describes him as a man of "confined education, naturally haughty, restless, and enterprising. In his conversation he was voluble, blunt, coarse, and profane; in his pretensions to knowledge, daring; and in his assertions, bold and peremptory. The confidence which he seemed to possess in himself naturally inspired confidence in others, still less informed; and they really believed that he who asserted so positively must be sure that his assertions were true. With these advantages, and these only, he early obtruded himself upon the public as an opposer, and ridiculer, of Christianity; and gloried in the character of an Infidel. A little circle of loose persons will always gather about a man of this description. Allen was surrounded by

a herd of such men, both parties being equally pleased; he, to be listened to as their oracle; and they to learn that a virtuous character was no better than a vicious one, and that God would punish vice neither here nor hereafter. By his own companions he was heard with attention and credit; and at times triumphed over modest antagonists by peremptoriness and effrontery, by rudeness and ribaldry." And this was all that President Dwight could find to say of the father of the freedom of Vermont, the man who, whatever his limitations, saved the very life of our brave little Commonwealth. It was the seaboard man again who remarked, in the person of Benedict Arnold, that Allen was "a proper man to lead his own wild people, but entirely unacquainted with military service".

The Hudson and Champlain valleys, the sea-level highway from the Atlantic to the St. Lawrence, seem to form a natural unity of all American territory to the east and to include Vermont with New England. Vermonters are blood relatives of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire, and filial homage binds us to their fellowship. A thousand ties, in culture and thought, in religion and education, in commerce and industry, unite us with the parent States, and we glory in our New England heritage and proudly claim our part in New England eminence and worth.

Nevertheless Vermont is not duly appreciated nor rightly understood until she is accorded her place as the last-born child of New England and the first bold emigrant to the West. It was the West in Vermont which President Dwight failed to appreciate. Our people were too rough for him and there was too much of the frontier about them. But it was the "wild people" of Ethan Allen who represented the New America, the America which was to become the American nation, rather than the cultured theologian or the gentleman soldier of the older communities. Two years after the Declaration of Independence, Massachusetts banished 60

graduates of Harvard College among some 300 Tories, and the roster of the English sympathizers is declared to read like "the beadroll of the oldest and noblest families concerned in the founding and upbuilding of New England civilization". The "wild people" never sold out their country. They made her what she is, subduing the continent for her home, and in conquering forest and prairie they created the type of man who was to stand before the world as the representative of the new continent—tall, sinewy strong, keen in wit, droll in speech, piercing to the heart of a matter with shrewd, discerning instinct, quick to pick a quarrel where his rights were concerned and never ready to lay it down till the last ball had left his rifle, generous in service for the common good, believing in the Declaration of Independence as his very gospel, his face to the empire in the west, whither his restless spirit led him on until he had stamped his institutions and his character on the nation whose home he had won.

In the history of America the East has always been a fixed term. It has denoted, and still denotes, the Atlantic seaboard, Europe-facing and Europe-thinking, conservative, commercial, manufacturing, tending to quiet, ordered ways, guardian of old-world culture, nursery of American literature, American learning, and American thought. So long as America was confined to the fringe of colonies on the Atlantic, the nation remained economically dependent, European in thought and culture. The nation was made by its expansion toward the west. Its real independence—intellectual, spiritual, and personal—was achieved in the conquest of the wide spaces of the mid-continent. The American genius was wrought on the ever-receding frontier.

The first stage of the march in the conquest of the continent was accomplished by the Green Mountain Boys. Our glory is not alone in Plymouth Rock; it is far more on the prairies and beneath the Rockies, where the spirit that awoke

first in the Green Mountain valleys has made America great. Vermont, first inland State, first proved the power of expansion in the American people. She was the first State which was never a colony, never in bondage to any man. Her closest kinship is with the free American pioneers, not with the old-world colonists. She can never be content as a minor state of New England, a dependency of Boston. The men of Vermont started for the west, and, if they did not get far, they got far enough to catch the spirit. It is ignorance of her history and denial of her genius that advise her to remain self-centered, training her children toward the occupations which their fathers happened to choose. Vermonters are citizens of great America, pioneers of a continent, and we demand an education toward the life of the nation.

Old Vermont!—to the hurrying traveler along her eastern and western highways, a wilderness of wild mountains with a narrow foreground of meager farms, but to those who know her defiles and passes a net-work of fertile valleys, smiling in plenty and content; baptized in struggle and bred to diplomacy and war, her children fighters all, yet as true a lover of peace as ever lived beside great hills; cautious, close-mouthed, secretive, trained by bitter experience to the wisdom of suspicion, yet opening her heart to her friends with the candor of a child; excelled by none in unity and brotherhood when roused to a common cause, then lapsing by reaction to jealousy and neighbor hate when times are tame and dull; never less defeated than when her case has gone against her, and always prompt with a motion to reconsider; the passions of two peoples struggling within her, the stable East and the restless West; loving her mountain sod with devotion unsurpassed in any land beside the seven seas, yet thrusting her children out to a better country—a mother of pioneers prodigal beyond all others; brave and self-sacrificing to a fault, proud and self-reliant, yet in her secret heart an underlying fear born of the bitterest disap-

pointments that ever attended the birth of a State; land of contradictions to her friends from without and to all who seek to put her genius into words; but to those who know her and to whom she accords her love, straightforward and single in loyalty to her mission: dear old Vermont!

*MEMBERS OF THE CLASS OF 1924:*

We welcome you this morning to the college of Daniel P. Thompson, where he learned just 100 years ago to love the Vermont forests and the story of the Vermont pioneers. We hope you will come to love them, too, and to imbibe as he did the strength of the hills. Whether from near or far, you will look out for four years on the graceful valley and the glorious mountains beyond, and, if you view them with sympathetic soul, they will teach you beyond any power of books. These mountains have been makers of men, men of strength, lovers of freedom more than lovers of life, simple in bearing, unpretentious, not effusive, but keen in mind, shrewd in judgment, unconquerable in will, good fighters, content that life should hold its inevitable disappointments, but never yielding their faith nor their pride. It is character we seek to build in you, Vermont character, founded on the strength of the hills, which we believe our college symbolizes both in outward form and in inward spirit. However learned or skilled you become, we shall have failed in our chief purpose unless we reach this goal. Very frankly and definitely Middlebury College is committed, not to the setting of all wisdom before you that you may choose we care not what, but to the exposition of that wisdom which makes men of the calibre of the men who made Vermont. There was never more need of such men than just now. To this work, therefore, let us set ourselves with all our strength.

I now declare you duly matriculated students of Middlebury College and members of the Class of 1924.





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